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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast - BLOCK QUOTES ONLY

Summary:  
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Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "One of the first stops in the Obama administration's foreign policy will be the talks with Iran. This is also the most pressing issue from Israel's standpoint. If Obama succeeds by diplomatic means in closing down the Iranian nuclear project-more power to him. If he fails, his

willingness to act by less diplomatic means will be tested..."

Senior diplomatic commentator Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "We don't know yet. A special and compelling man [Obama] who is meant for great things and will become one of the most brilliant American presidents in the new age, or a rock star who accidentally reached politics, a talented and charismatic rhetorician who lacks any real experience or ability, someone who made history by reaching his post but will not make a mark and will not stop America's decline."

Dov Weissglas, close associate of former PM Sharon, opined in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Israel's opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state-which is the only means of ending the oppression and occupation-is rooted, mainly, in the inability (or unwillingness) of the Palestinians to prevent and refrain from terror."

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "His [Obama] two top priorities are the economy and the hot wars the US is involved in, in Iraq and Afghanistan, the only two foreign countries he mentioned by name in his address... He didn't mention Iran, China, Russia, any of the European countries - or Israel. Which doesn't mean that he has forgotten us - just that we are down on his list of priorities..."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Precisely at a time when Israel is drunk on power after Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, it should listen to Obama's sober words: 'Our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please ... our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause.'" Israel should internalize Obama's call for restraint as an attribute of security, as well as his approach that favors dialogue and seeking paths toward understanding with yesterday's enemies."

Aluf Benn, senior diplomatic correspondent for the left-leaning, liberal Ha'aretz wrote: "Israel, like the Gazan state of our day, has suffered since its inception from economic boycotts and wars with its neighbors. But unlike Hamas, Israel relied on a UN resolution and took care to obtain recognition from the superpowers. This was the basis for its establishment, and solidified its international status despite its hostile environment. Hamas, too, could obtain international recognition, if it would agree to recognize Israel and previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements.... But for now, Khaled Meshal and Ismail Haniyeh prefer to be the neighborhood bullies who conduct their foreign policy via rockets rather than diplomacy"

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I. "Yes, He Can"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/21): "Every American president promises in his inauguration address to lead his country and the world into a new, good and benevolent age, but coming from Barack Obama it sounded different. It was not the words that made his inauguration such a significant event, it was the context.... The wondrous story of Obama's election as president is not only the story of the Black minority in the United States. It inspires hope in every person whose path to fulfilling a dream is blocked due to his belonging to a minority.... However, he sought to convince the Muslim world that he was headed for a new dialogue based on mutual respect. These are not empty words: One of the first steps in the Obama administration's foreign policy will be the talks with Iran. This is also the most pressing issue from Israel's standpoint. If Obama succeeds by diplomatic means in closing down the Iranian nuclear project-more power to him. If he fails, his willingness to act by less diplomatic means will be tested... Nothing significant is expected to happen on the Israel-Obama front until after the new government is formed in Israel at the beginning of March. Since it is reasonable to assume that the next government will be more right wing than the current government, it is doubtful whether it will feel as comfortable in Washington as the Sharon and Olmert governments felt.... The ability of the Obama administration to bring about a positive turn in the Middle East depends first and foremost on his success at home. Only a strong president who has coped with the economic crisis will be able to overcome the problems

posed by the Middle East, from Afghanistan to Gaza."

## II. "The End of Romance"

Ben Caspit, senior diplomatic commentator wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/21): "... What is he [Obama]? We don't know yet. A special and compelling man who is meant for great things and will become one of the most brilliant American presidents in the new age, or a rock star who accidentally reached politics, a talented and charismatic rhetorician who lacks any real experience or ability, someone who made history by reaching his post but will not make a mark and will not stop America's decline. In other words, is Obama a talented coacher who knows how to make speeches and give advice, or is he a real bulldozer who can extricate the semi-trailer from the mud? All answers are possible. America is waking up this morning from the romance to real life. The party is over, now comes the hangover....Unlike many others, Obama has built a professional, opinionated, high-quality team. A team of people who will not be afraid of him, will not pull any punches and will tell it to him as they see it. This can succeed, and it can also crash.... "

## III. "Yes, We Can?"

Dov Weissglas, close associate of former PM Sharon, opined in the the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/21): "...the essence of our expectation of President Obama is this: Understanding the Israeli position on the Middle East conflict and support of it requires patience. A great deal of patience. The overt equation is simple: An occupied and oppressed people versus an occupying and oppressing people. Israel's opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state-which is the only means of ending the oppression and occupation-is rooted, mainly, in the inability (or unwillingness) of the Palestinians to prevent and refrain from terror. President Bush had a great deal of patience for us; he understood this well. He is the creator of the road map-the diplomatic formula according to which the Palestinians are first of all required to eradicate terror and reform their government, and only then will they receive a state of their own. This is a diplomatic order of advancement that is the main guarantee for preventing a state of chaos and terror. When the Obama administration announces its support for such a diplomatic order, and reaffirms its opposition to establishing a Palestinian state without this precondition being upheld-we will know that we can rejoice in his election."

## IV: "Glimpses, Sans Poetry, into his Program"

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (1/21): "To a nation, and indeed a world, accustomed by now to the soaring oratory of US President Barack Obama, his inaugural speech probably won't be remembered as his finest... But Obama's inaugural address didn't live up to some of his better stump speeches... But those speeches were delivered when he was candidate Obama, when he was selling the country a vision. Now he is President Obama, and the weight of the world has shifted to his shoulders. Obama has to present a program, and programs are far less poetic than visions. The world, including Israel, was given a glimpse into the Obama program Tuesday night, and it largely matched expectations... His two top priorities are the economy and the hot wars the US is involved in, in Iraq and Afghanistan, the only two foreign countries he mentioned by name in his address... He didn't mention Iran, China, Russia, any of the European countries - or Israel. Which doesn't mean that he has forgotten us - just that we are down on his list of priorities..."

## V: "Not for Peace Alone"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "...In addressing the international community, Obama spoke about a new strategy that rests on international cooperation and adherence to values, and uses force only prudently and wisely.... Obama called for a new relationship between America and the Muslim world, one based on common interests and mutual respect. He warned corrupt rulers who oppress their people that they are on the wrong side of history....As to leaders who blame the West for their countries' ills, Obama warned that they will be judged "on what you can build, not what you destroy." ...Israel was not mentioned in the speech, but its leaders need to listen carefully to the message that went out from Washington yesterday. ...The new president intends to speak with states and leaders that were boycotted during the Bush era such as Iran and Syria. Like other governments worldwide, the new government in Jerusalem after the elections will be judged by its ability to integrate into the processes Obama will lead and its

willingness to cooperate with him. In short, on its success in building, not destroying....Precisely at a time when Israel is drunk on power after Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, it should listen to Obama's sober words: "Our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please ... our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause." Israel should internalize Obama's call for restraint as an attribute of security, as well as his approach that favors dialogue and seeking paths toward understanding with yesterday's enemies. And Israeli voters would do well to remember Obama's words when the time comes to decide for whom to cast their ballots."

#### VI: "A made-to-order State"

Senior diplomatic correspondent for the left-leaning, liberal Ha'aretz wrote (1/21): "The cease-fire in the Gaza Strip offers a good opportunity to reexamine the central idea behind the Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process - an idea whose title could be "a made-to-order state" or "a designer state." From Oslo to Annapolis, via the interim agreements and the road map, with encouragement from the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan and the Geneva Initiative, all the agreements, understandings and proposals focused on drafting a detailed plan for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the territories, with a democratic constitution and a detailed list of its authorities and responsibilities.... There is only one problem: All these pieces of paper had trouble coping with reality... No agreement can cope with developments such as dozens of suicide bombings or Hamas' rise to power. ....When the carefully designed model collapsed in the West Bank, an alternative model developed in Gaza - one of building a state "from the bottom up," without negotiations and without an agreement. The cease-fire, which ensures Hamas' continued rule in Gaza, creates a sort of Palestinian independence there, albeit under harsh conditions of physical destruction, economic blockade and bitter hostility on the part of its neighbors...."Hamastan" is not the first state in the region to arise without an agreement, following a unilateral withdrawal by the previous ruling power. It was preceded by Israel, which was established after the British announced their abandonment of the Mandate for Palestine/Land of Israel....Israel, like the Gazan state of our day, has suffered since its inception from economic boycotts and wars with its neighbors. But unlike Hamas, Israel relied on a UN resolution and took care to obtain recognition from the superpowers. This was the basis for its establishment, and solidified its international status despite its hostile environment. Hamas, too, could obtain international recognition, if it would agree to recognize Israel and previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements..., But for now, Khaled Meshal and Ismail Haniyeh prefer to be the neighborhood bullies who conduct their foreign policy via rockets rather than diplomacy. Maybe the war just finished will make them understand that the way to consolidate the independence they have achieved in Gaza is through a diplomatic move."

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